STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT



# AN ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO FOR THE REUNIFICATION OF KOREA

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USAWC CLASS OF 1997

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050

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# An Alternative Scenario for the Reunification of Korea

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: An Alternative Scenario for the Reunification of Korea

DATE: 10 May, 1997

PAGES: 39

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper predicts an alternate scenario to Korean reunification to those currently being discussed in and out of South Korea. Much of what has been written discusses the demise of the present North Korean government along a spectrum of turbulence, from gradual decay to violent implosion ("soft" and "hard landings"). The predicted results also vary from peaceful absorption by the South Korean government to a "war of desperation" scenario precipitated by the decaying Northern regime in a last ditch effort to retain power. The point of commonality among all the discussions is that the Koreas are the primary drivers behind each reunification scenario. This paper explores a scenario where the two Koreas end up as secondary players in future of the Korean peninsula. The primary regional actor to emerge will be China. The implications of Korean reunification on the future Northeast Asian region are too far-reaching for China to assume a wait-and-see role. As the ascendant regional power China will shape events on the Korean Peninsula to fit its own future vision of Northeast Asia. It is further proposed that this Chinese vision will seek to maintain the peaceful division of North and South Korea in the short term (10 to 20 years) following the demise, hard or soft, of the present North Korean government. China is seen, in this scenario, as moving unilaterally, on the basis of long-standing agreements with North Korea, into North Korea as the government implodes to 1) prevent a new peninsular war instigated in desperation by the North, 2) to put in place a moderate, pro-Chinese, interim government capable of stabilizing the North Korean internal situation, albeit with heavy

Chinese assistance, and 3) to check the growth of U.S. regional influence. China views the implications for the region, and itself, as too great for this matter to be left solely to the Koreans to solve. It is in the Chinese interest to prevent the uncontrolled rise of a new, potentially powerful reunified Korean regional competitor. Additionally, China will seek to minimize, or at least prevent the increase, of United States' influence in the region, which would predictably occur in a South Korean controlled reunification scenario. For obvious historical, military and economic reasons, the Japanese desire to maintain the geopolitical and economic status quo will cause them to play a supporting role in the Chinese effort. U.S. efforts to alter this scenario will be hampered by its negligible influence with the Chinese, the Chinese-North Korean agreements under which China will legitimately enter North Korea as its government's decay reaches critical mass, the tacit Japanese support, and the fact that the Chinese are in the best position to prevent the crashing North Korean government to spark a war that would be disastrous for all nations in the region. This move, together with its predictable control of the Spratly Islands oil and natural gas reserves, an already powerful military, and rapidly growing economy, will put China in a position to much more effectively influence the future of the region. In effect, this scenario will enable China to replace the U.S. as the regional stabilizer. The Japanese and the South Koreans will look to China to set the future pace and direction for Northeast Asia, as U.S. regional influence begins to wane. Predictably, this is a scenario the Chinese cannot fail to foresee and seriously consider.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"China would not watch North Korea experience difficulties with both hands in our pockets"*[1]

-Senior Chinese Military Researcher-

Security on the Korean Peninsula has, for centuries, been the result of decisions and actions taken by Korea's powerful Northeast Asian neighbors (i.e. Russia, Japan and China), and most recently, by the United States. Indeed, Korea is where the strategic interests of these powerful nations intersect. Current discussion of future reunification scenarios has, however, concentrated almost exclusively on the actions that should be taken by the North and South Korean governments to achieve unification, and how regional neighbors and the U.S. can and should assist. From this literature the assumption could be made, particularly in the case of South Korean writings, that the Korean people, led primarily by the South Korean government, will be the drivers of the pace and tempo of the reunification process.[2] In view of current politico-economic conditions in Northeast Asia, and the national interests of regional players, if history is any indication, there is a compelling argument that the Korean people will not be allowed to solve this issue themselves. What this paper proposes is that the reunification of Korea will most probably be controlled by the action of powerful regional actors in yet another cycle of a well-established Korean historical legacy. The central thesis is that China is positioned to act in Korea in such a way that guarantees peace on the peninsula, protects Chinese national interests, and sets the conditions for expansion of Chinese influence in the region, quite possibly at the expense of the U.S. When the implications

of a unified Korea on the future of Northeast Asian regional stability are carefully examined from an external geopolitical, military and economic standpoint, the Chinese appear to be in a uniquely capable position to redesign the future of the region to serve China's national interests, and those of other regional players. This paper will initially examine the historical precedents for the thesis. Next, current economic and geopolitical conditions within the region will be examined for indicators of future Chinese action within the context of a number of previously proposed reunification scenarios.[3] Finally, in view of potential Chinese actions, recommendations on future foreign policy emphasis to optimize protection of national interests in the area are discussed, first, from a Republic of Korea viewpoint, followed by the same discussion from a United States' perspective. By establishing the probability, or, at least, the credibility of a historically-based alternative to more familiar Korean reunification scenarios, a broader discussion of its effect on ROK and U.S. national and regional interests can occur. In this way, the basis for development of practical future regional foreign policy approaches can be more clearly and accurately developed.

## HISTORY

*"Korea is to China as lips are to teeth and (being of the same body) each must share in the joys and sorrows of the other"*[4]

Chinese interest in Korea is almost as old as the known history of the region. Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism migrated to Korea and flourished throughout the Three Kingdoms Period (1st through 3rd century A.D.) and the Unified Period ( 4th century through the 10th century A.D.). The profound Sinification that forms the foundation of Korean culture today was established during this period.[5] The *Tang* dynasty of China supplied armies that aided the Korean Shilla kingdom in unifying Korea in 668 A.D. for the first time. Though subsequent Chinese attempts to seize land in northern Korea led the Shilla kingdom to oust the Chinese armies in 735 A.D., the Chinese effect upon Korean society and culture was permanent.[6] The Mongol invasions of 1231, 1232, 1254 and 1259 later resulted in the vassalage of Korea to the Chinese *Yuan* dynasty established by the Mongols in 1271.[7] Chinese influence was again increased when the Korean *Yi* dynasty, established in 1392, had by 1418 secured the recognition of the Chinese *Ming* court. This recognition established a period of Chinese suzerainty over Korea that would last until 1894.[8] The Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636 secured Korean loyalty simultaneously with their establishment of the *Ch`ing* dynasty in China, continuing Korea's role as a Chinese vassal. The Chinese and Koreans would fight the Japanese on Korean ground several times in 1592, 1597 and most recently in the 1894 Sino-Japanese war. Korea assisted the Manchus in their war against the Russian incursions into the Amur River region in 1654 and 1658. Chinese-Korean boundaries established in 1712 set the present day boundaries between the two countries,

with Korea losing all claims to Manchuria where a substantial ethnic Korean population exists to this day.[9] The Sino-Japanese War of 1894 began after competition between Japan and China over interests in Korea exploded into hostilities.[10] Japanese armies defeated the Chinese army in a series of battles in Seoul and Pyongyang, eventually crossing the Yalu River into Manchuria and landing on the Liaotung Peninsula capturing Port Arthur and Dairen. The peace treaty signed in April, 1895, forced China to recognize Korean independence, cede Taiwan, pay a large indemnity and lease the Liaotung peninsula to Japan for 25 years.[11]

The Japanese achieved here the foothold they had sought for centuries on the Korean peninsula. Japan had always referred to Korea as "the dagger pointed at the heart of Japan."[12] This description underscored the strategic value the peninsula offered to any potential invader of Japan. Conversely, Korea was Japan's gateway to mainland Asia and Russia. Controlling the Korean peninsula would guarantee the Japanese forward military bases near high value areas of interest in support of growing Japanese expansionist policy in the region. Thus, Korea was always a land the Japanese sought to control and a nation they sought to absorb into their sphere of influence.[13] An independent Korean nation represented as much a threat to the Japanese as any other mainland nation, particularly if a vassal of China or any other great power.

The Russian interest in Korea centered solely around their search for an Asian warm-water port. Initially, the Russian diplomats attempted to establish influence with the Koreans that might lead to Korean port access. This foreign policy move was abandoned when Russia leased access to Port Arthur from China in 1898.[14] However,

securing Korea was critical to securing its access to this port and protecting its vulnerable line of communication back to Russia from attack by the Japanese or any other potential invader of the region.

By the late 19th century, United States' interest in Korea was limited to its barter value in the negotiations the U.S. would mediate among the Japanese, Chinese and the Russians. The utility of the Korea pawn as an element of regional peace negotiations took precedence over its rights as a sovereign nation. Korea, as a nation, to that time had never been successful in establishing sufficient credibility with the great powers to warrant sovereign nation status. The lack of sovereign national identity made it simple for the great powers to sanction the Japanese occupation, followed by annexation of Korea, without protest.[15] This attitude continued through the end of World War II. During the war, Korea had not stirred up sufficient interest with the Allies to warrant any military operations being mounted there, though substantial Japanese forces were stationed there. The Russians were entirely too preoccupied with the Nazi threat along the Russian Western border. The Chinese Nationalist and Communist Armies, due to the heavy setbacks they were being dealt by the Japanese forces within Mainland China, never got to the point where large scale operations in or against the Korean peninsula were possible. World War II operations in Korea amounted to local guerrilla operations, which, while never threatening the Japanese control of the Peninsula, did cause them considerable problems and kept alive the spirit of nationalism among the Korean people.[16]

At Cairo in 1943, the U.S., Soviet Union, Great Britain and China issued a joint communiqué stating that "Korea shall be free and independent in due course."[17] However, no concrete plan for independence materialized as a result of the conference. American interest in Korea did not resurface until the closing days of the war, when the Russians, in a bid to grab strategic pieces of Japanese-held land in Northeast Asia, declared war against Japan and quickly began to occupy Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands (with plans against Hokkaido), and Korea, ostensibly to receive the surrender of the Japanese forces there. The U.S. government shaken by the rapidity of the Russian moves in Asia, and the implications for the post-war period, hurriedly entered into negotiations with the Soviet government. It was during the development of American proposals to the Russians that the infamous 38th parallel was agreed upon as the line which would separate the U.S. and Russian zones of occupation in Korea. Each army would accept the surrender of the Japanese forces and equipment within its zone. The Korean government in exile was not a party to the negotiations, until after the dividing line had been set.[18] The partition and subsequent inability of the U.S. or Soviets to allow the Koreans to determine their own national identity, left the Korean nation divided and irretrievably at ideological odds when both great powers withdrew in 1948, and set the conditions for war in 1950.[19]

The Soviets trained and equipped a relatively formidable North Korean army prior to their departure, while the U.S. left a poorly trained and poorly equipped constabulary force in place to defend South Korea. Fiercely strong leaders in the North and South

were determined to unify Korea under their own terms. Conditions in Korea were ideally set for war. China was communist by 1949, led by Mao Tse Tung and his huge army, after forcing the Kuomintang Nationalist government to flee to Formosa, leaving the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) unarguably the most powerful military force in the Far East. The Chinese mainland was nearly unified under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the stage was set for China to turn its attention, once again, to the Korean peninsula.

## THE KOREAN WAR

*"The Chinese people... will not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by the imperialists."*[20]

-Zhou Enlai, 1950-

As opposed to the notion that Chinese entry into the Korean War was a Soviet-mandated role in support of a larger monolithic communist plan, it is now clear that Chinese decisionmaking was far more independent than previously held.[21] The deliberations between the Soviets and the Chinese and the Soviets and the North Koreans in the 1948-1949 time period were much more parallel than triangular, which explains why the Chinese role in Korea, though carefully planned, was more a "reaction" to U.S. intervention in the Taiwan Straits and Korea.[22] While Mao had worked out with Stalin an agreed upon Soviet military support package in the event of Chinese intervention in Korea, indicating he was aware of the plan, it is not at all clear that Mao was apprised of the timing of the North Korean attack. What is clear is that China did not directly take part in the planning by Stalin and Kim Il Sung for the North Korean invasion.[23] While China may have been surprised by the timing of the North Korean attack, it is now known that Mao Tse Tung was issuing preparatory instructions to the PLA in mid August 1950, even though it appeared that the North Korean Army would be successful in its bid to push the United Nations off the peninsula.[24] This was predicated by Mao's

respect for the entry of U.S. forces in the conflict, concern over the North Koreans' unprotected northern flank, and because the Chinese leaders were convinced that the U.S. and China were inevitably headed for military confrontation in Northeast Asia.[25] Release by the Chinese government and the former Soviet government of key documents and cables of the period shows the notion that Chinese involvement was at the direction of the Soviets to be much less the case than previously thought. [26] Once again, in the 20th century China was acting against a perceived threat to its border with Korea and its interests in Taiwan.[27] In much the same way as it had in the past, China was moving to maintain a pro-Chinese, Korean buffer state in power, while at the same time, establishing China as a communist revolutionary power equal to the task of defeating a U.S. led, capitalist coalition.[28] Mao was convinced that once on the offensive, only a defeat of American forces in the field would convince the U.S. to negotiate.[29] Although there was a pledge by Stalin of equipment to supply 20 divisions and Soviet air support to the Chinese forces, it did not materialize until two months after the Chinese were already engaged in Korea.[30]

The decision by China to intervene against the U.S. and 15 other nations in Korea without Soviet support was a considerably bold one in late 1950, particularly since the CCP's primary military focus prior to the Korean War, was the seizure of Taiwan.[31] Chinese intervention would result in the survival of the pro-Chinese North Korean regime, stun the U.S. government and the world, force the United Nations forces to eventually alter their war objectives and, against the desires of both Korean governments, force the United Nations to the negotiating table to settle the war on Chinese terms. The

Chinese had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve in Korea, independent of Soviet and North Korean objectives, and what this achievement could do for China's future world image. The Soviets had shown themselves to be self serving and unreliable, albeit a vast reservoir of military equipment. Kim Il Sung's desire for a unified Korea was not an element of Chinese regional interest. On the contrary, Kim, as well as the equally bellicose Syngman Rhee, could be held indefinitely in check under a divided Korea framework, limiting the growth of U.S. or Japanese influence, while China maintained a buffer state, highly dependent and in its debt. Therefore, a divided Korea and the 1953 armistice arrangement best served the Chinese purpose then, and into the foreseeable future.

It is against the backdrop of the Chinese resolve to intervene alone in Korea, confronting the most powerful Western nations in the world in 1950, that one must consider China's motives and willingness to continue to shape events in Korea today and in the future.

Throughout Korea's long history, great power competition was what drove the destiny of the Korean nation. Korea's geopolitical position has made security arrangements on the Korean Peninsula much too important to too many other regional players to be left up to the Koreans alone to work out. As always, Korea found itself to be "the shrimp between two whales." [32] The Korean inability to settle internal differences, and, instead, the alignment of South and North Korea with the great powers against one another is as much to blame for this lack of Korean control of their own destiny in the post-WWII era, as it had been in the past. The cycle of externally imposed

division turned over one more time in 1950-1953, resulting in a war that devastated the country like no other in history to yield little difference from the situation that existed at the outset. However, while from a Korean standpoint little was accomplished, from a Chinese standpoint, a great leap forward had taken place for the Chinese communist nation. What is unique about the Korean War is that it was the first conflict between the West and Communism. What is not unique was the intervention of China on the Korean Peninsula.

The Chinese decision to enter the fight against the United States in Korea in 1950 is critical to understanding Chinese resolve as far as the Korean peninsula is concerned, then and now, especially in light of China's emerging status in Northeast Asia and the world. The geopolitics of the area were important enough to China in 1950 for her to risk a wider war with the U.S. and her Allies, with possible nuclear implications. China was a mere 5 years out of World War II and only one year removed from its own great Civil War on the mainland. Its army was massive, but its weapons and equipment were mediocre at best. China's economy was in ruins and only a blueprint for reconstruction existed. Yet, China fought the U.S. led U.N. forces to a standstill in Korea, clearly successful in its use of the military element of power to set the conditions for diplomatic and political success. The result was regional status quo that achieved Chinese national interests, and established China as a regional player that must be reckoned with in the future by any power with interests in Asia. Most importantly, China established her abiding national interests in Korea and her resolve to protect them. The 43 years that have transpired since the armistice ended the Korean War have been witness to the

steady, albeit slow, growth of the Chinese economy and modernization of its formidable armed forces. Predictions for the short-term future show China as the newest, and, quite possibly, the strongest Asian economic "tiger" to emerge. The Chinese-Soviet alliance, which was such a source of concern to the West in 1950, has since been shown to have been more form than substance, and more Western presumption than fact .

What the previous historical discussion points out are two critical recurring patterns in Northeast Asian history: 1) Korea's destiny has habitually been determined by larger external powers and, 2) China has always considered Korea critical to its national security and has never hesitated to act to achieve security arrangements in Korea to protect those interests. These points provide the basis upon which discussion of the possible future of Korean Peninsula can now take place.

## NORTHEAST ASIA TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

*"Driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia."*[33]

How have things in Northeast Asia changed since 1953? How have China's national interests changed? How have the other regional players changed? Today, the Soviet Union has crumbled, and Russia is beset with internal troubles that will see her well into the 21st century. Russia, for the time being is not willing, nor is it able, to be a proactive regional player in anything short of a direct threat to its borders. Japan has recovered from its defeat in World War II to become the most powerful Asian economy, second worldwide only to the U.S. Japan, however, has to date forsworn rearmament beyond its own self-defense, and has only recently even discussed the possibility of sending Japanese forces abroad to participate in peacekeeping coalition actions.[34] Today, Japan maintains diplomatic relations with both South and North Korea, as well as with China. The *Chosen Soren,* or the "Association of North Koreans Living in Japan", operates freely within Japan and is a major source of hard currency flow into North Korea.[35] While the Japanese would certainly welcome an end to the threat North Korea poses to the region, they clearly would prefer to maintain the current national division, forestalling a future economic confrontation with a unified Korea. The economic competition of a unified Korea, at least potentially, surpasses that of South Korea alone, making it a much more difficult regional partner to contend with. Also, the combined military strength of North and South Korea would introduce an altogether new military

equation to the power balance in Northeast Asia. Heavily dependent upon future U.S. decisions on the level of American regional presence in Korea and Japan, a large combined Korean military could conceivably cause Japan to seriously consider rearmament, with the grave regional repercussions that decision would entail.[36]

The U.S. has emerged from the Cold War as the world's dominant superpower, both militarily and economically. U.S. forces still remain in South Korea, with significant additional forces in Japan, augmented by a powerful naval presence along the coast of Asia. These forces have been the tangible evidence of U.S. resolve to maintain peace not only in Korea, but throughout the region, guaranteeing, at least to this point, the defense of Taiwan and Japan. But over the last few years, and into the foreseeable future, the U.S. faces strong internal pressure to draw its forces down worldwide in light of the end of the Cold War. Economically, the U.S. has become the world's largest borrower, and it appears its economy's potential for future growth may be limited.[37] The U.S. is showing difficulty in clearly defining its national interests in Northeast Asia to an American Congress probing for defense cutbacks to support domestic agendas. Recent incidents in Okinawa have caused the Japanese as well as the American government to carefully consider the reasons for maintaining U.S. forces in Asia. Though no large scale reductions appear imminent, it is not clear what a new wave of U.S. defense structure drawdowns will mean for U.S. forces in Korea and Japan.

South Korea, since the 1960s, has shown remarkable economic growth to the present day when it stands on the verge of becoming a serious regional rival for Japan and Taiwan.[38] Its ground forces have modernized immensely, though much

improvement is yet to be made in its naval and air forces. Its government has gradually increased stability, as evidenced by its economic performance, the eschewing of coups since 1980, and the peaceful election of its first non-military president since 1948. The *Nordpolitik* diplomacy of President Roh The Woo resulted in the opening of full diplomatic relations with Russia and China in 1990 and 1992 respectively.[39] This dealt a severe diplomatic blow to North Korea, and established the fact that South Korea could no longer be ignored as a major regional power. Another impressive characteristic has been the South Korean government's remarkable restraint in the face of significant North Korean provocation. When the number of North Korean armed infiltrations, assassination attempts on the South Korean president, and airline bombings are considered, the U.S. presence alone cannot be considered the basis for the lack of South Korean military retaliation.[40] These direct attacks upon South Korea have backfired dramatically on Pyongyang, resulting in increased South Korean prestige worldwide, and further isolation of North Korea.

North Korea, on the other hand, over the last twenty years has witnessed a dramatic downturn in its economy, especially with the demise of the Soviet Union. Chinese aid has also been reduced in view of the North Korean regime's inability to institute economic reforms.[41] The disastrous North Korean harvests of the last five years have resulted in a worldwide effort to send food aid to the North Korean people. News of food riots is a story repetitively heard from an ever-growing stream of defectors, many of them high governmental officials.[42] The focus of the North Korean economy throughout the period since the armistice has been its armed forces. The North Korean military

currently remains one of the largest in the world, and is still the basis of power upon which the Korean Worker's Party continues to operate. In a desperate search for hard cash, North Korea has become a major weapons supplier to the Third World. North Korean production of the SCUD-B and -C ballistic missiles among many other conventional arms has found buyers in the Middle East and Africa.[43] Its development of newer long range missiles, capable of carrying nuclear, chemical and biological warheads make it a potential threat throughout the region.[44] Most recently, suspicions concerning North Korean nuclear weapons development have raised serious questions about possible reactions of the current regime to what appears to be an inevitable, if not imminent, internal collapse.[45] The deeper issue is the fact that North Korea has been reduced to humanitarian appeal and coercion to deal with its economic problems. North Korea's attempts to exercise economic reforms have not met with much international response.[46] The probability of governmental collapse due the deteriorating economic situation is therefore high.[47] Scenarios for the North Korean demise fall into non-violent ("soft landing") and violent ("hard landing") categories.[48] Keeping these scenarios in mind, the key question at hand, is what options will be exercised by the regional players when this demise occurs.

What is clear to all regional players involved (China, South Korea, Japan , U.S. and Russia) is that a rapid reunification of Korea would run contrary to the interests of all from an economic as well as geopolitical standpoint.[49] The Korean confluence of the interests of so many big power players is in keeping with the Korean historical legacy. As is has been in the past, whoever takes control of events on the Korean Peninsula as the

present North Korean regime passes into oblivion, will have preeminent influence in Northeast Asia in the early 21st century.

The assumption that South Korea will inherit the primary role in the reconstruction and/or reunification is to ignore the historical precedent of repetitive Chinese intervention. The present day conditions in the region put China in a much stronger position to act than it has ever been in throughout history. The neutralization of Russia and Japan, the North Korean hostility toward any active U.S. involvement and the questionable ability of the ROK government to act effectively in a timely manner to forestall rapid internal destabilization in North Korea, make these players unlikely candidates for the task. China's status as North Korea's closest ally, the 1961 Sino-North Korean Mutual Assistance and Defense Treaty and her powerful economic and military capabilities provide the substantive (i.e. legal and physical) wherewithal for China to quickly intervene in, and stabilize any North Korean implosion scenario.[50] Further, it is conceivable that the present North Korean regime would request Chinese assistance as it sought to maintain control against whatever internal threat it was facing.

Feasible Chinese objectives would be to 1) preserve the status quo on the peninsula, maintaining the Korean buffer to the Chinese border, 2) forestall any violent destabilization that would lead to military conflict on the Korean peninsula and 3) establish a moderate, pro-Chinese government in North Korea capable of implementing needed economic reforms.[51] This action would solve the primary Chinese national security concerns arising over the possibility of a pro-U.S. Korean regime on its borders. Additionally, the danger of spillover of an internal North Korean civil war into

Manchuria with its high concentration of ethnic Koreans would be eliminated.[52] Finally, this would be an opportunity to solve the problem of an anachronistic Stalinist dictatorship China had historical ties to, but which was perpetually unstable and constituted an economic and political liability to the region.

The Japanese, from a short-term standpoint, can be expected to support any action that stabilizes the North Korean military threat, and that, in the long-term, forestalls the introduction of a unified Korean economic and military rival. This aspect eliminates the need for Japan to consider rearmament or new economic strategies to deal with a reunified Korean challenge, while simultaneously opening the door for what could possibly become a domestically popular reduction of U.S. forces stationed in Japan.[53] The South Korean government, without any viable alternatives to exercise once the Chinese act, may find it necessary as time goes on to drift closer to China, and possibly away from the U.S., in order to set the conditions for future reunification. Finally, the U.S. could find that, in a single move, the Chinese will have checked the growth of American influence in the region by co-opting the interests of Japan and South Korea, while establishing itself as the preeminent guarantor of peace and stability in the region. This, in concert with Chinese economic growth and military modernization, would significantly increase China's world wide prestige, its image as an emergent super-power, and its transition into a U.S. near-peer competitor in the early 21st century. This action would represent yet another cycle of a pattern of Chinese national interests in Korea that is centuries old. Further, it would be representative of a historically based Korean legacy of frustrated self-determination, and great power influence.

It seems evident that it would be a mistake to assume that China has distanced itself from North Korea. While the Chinese and North Koreans may have drifted apart as far as their vision of the West, capitalism, and the new world order is concerned, China remains North Korea's number one ally. By maintaining its historical ties to North Korea, China keeps itself in the best position to act in the event of rapid North Korean collapse. A war sparked by imminent collapse of the North Korean regime would be disastrous for the region, and certainly threaten China's national interests on the peninsula.[54] South Korea and Japan are rich regional trading partners whose continued existence are as critical to China's economic future as Taiwan and Hong Kong. Military attack of these countries only threatens Chinese national interests. War against one or any combination of these partners only destroys the vibrant, growing economies which China seeks to tap into. War in the region has become the only foreign policy option that exponentially damages the economic situation of all Northeast Asian nations. It is, quite literally, economic suicide and runs counter to the national interests of all concerned. The most compelling argument against war in the region may be that it is, in almost any conceivable scenario involving rational governments, totally counterproductive to any plan for economic growth in the area. China will simply not allow it to occur, especially over the survival of a nepotist dictatorial cult that is long overdue for relegation to oblivion.

## POLICY OPTIONS: A ROK APPROACH

*"Do not trust Americans, Do not let Russians deceive you,*
*Japanese will rise again, Koreans watch your steps."*[55]
-Popular Korean rhyme, circa 1945-

Under the assumption that China can and will act in the event of a North Korean collapse, what are the implications for South Korean policy makers as they look toward the future? In terms of reunification, China is clearly capable of affecting events in North Korea; the U.S. clearly is not. Would not a closer relationship with China now set the conditions for a much more ROK-favorable environment as the NK government transitions? First, the most apparent characteristic of future South Korean foreign policy must be closer ties to China.[56] The ability of China to act unilaterally as previously discussed quite obviously indicates a need for future South Korean policy to take advantage of Chinese intentions to realize ROK national interests. While these interests may include reunification, they also include minimizing the costs to, and the negative impact upon the South Korean economy. Chinese intervention in North Korea, while giving Beijing control of future events on the Korean Peninsula, also imposes a heavy economic burden on the Chinese economy as it now must subsidize North Korea economic survival and recovery, until reforms can be put in place and operate long enough to have a positive effect. By avoiding these costs, South Korea will witness the initial economic recovery of the North at little or no expense to its own economy. Closer diplomatic ties to the Chinese will offer the South Koreans the opportunity to influence the planning, timing and execution of this economic recovery at much less cost than a scenario where South Korea alone is saddled with the debt of North Korean recovery.

The Chinese sponsorship of North Korea would continue while South Korea negotiates a future date with China when true reunification could take place. This would involve a period of confidence building between Seoul and Beijing that may necessarily include a cooling of ROK-U.S. relations.

This particular issue will depend heavily upon the status and direction of Sino-U.S. relations at the time. Maintaining U.S. presence in Northeast Asia is desirable to South Korea (as a bargaining chip with North Korea) and China in order to deter Japanese rearmament. A U.S. pullout alone, much less combined with future Korean reunification and growing Chinese economic and military influence, could cause the Japanese to seriously consider rearmament in order to secure their interests in the region. The U.S. remains a stabilizing factor in Northeast Asia well into the 21st century. What China seeks to curtail is increased U.S. regional influence as a result of the changing situation in Korea. What this does for Seoul is provide it leverage with Beijing. Until the reunification process is actually initiated by the two Koreas, even a moderate North Korea under Chinese suzerainty, will represent a threat. Until an agreed to framework for peace, followed by a plan for reunification is worked out by the two Koreas, the danger of conflict will remain.

Assuming the validity of an assumption of Chinese intervention, South Korea must soberly consider the next 10 to 20 years and design future foreign policy to influence the actions of the big power players in Northeast Asia, especially China, to achieve Seoul's vision of the Korean Peninsula in 2025 and 2050. South Korea's role is unchanged from that of past centuries, with the exception that it operates from a position

of considerable economic and military power. These advantages it must utilize to align the interests of the U.S. and China with its own, avoiding having to choose between the two.[57]

## POLICY OPTIONS: A U.S. APPROACH

*"Hold your friends close.....but hold your enemies closer..."*
-Don Vito Corleone, *The Godfather*-

U.S. national interests in Northeast Asia clearly lie in balancing power in the region in order to set the conditions for economic growth of two key allies (South Korea and Japan) and the United States. The preservation of the independence of Taiwan is fast becoming as anachronistic as the leaders on both sides who still believe it is an issue. In fact the economic "knitting" of Taiwan to the mainland is already well underway, making any issue of war essentially moot. To attack Taiwan is for China to literally put a gun to its economic head.[58] Taiwan is now already China's richest province.

What the U.S. must decide is whether to be a part of a process in Northeast Asia that will take place with or without its participation. This process is the growth of a new and powerful economic region that will encompass China (and Taiwan), Japan and Korea. The key destabilizing factor in the future is North Korea. The demise of its current regime can only be delayed, and the only regional player with the military, moral, and political wherewithal to intervene is China. Clearly it is in China's best interest to do so, as it is in the U.S. interest only if the U.S. is a regional player. By failing to recognize China's unique position in stabilizing the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. could continue to alienate China to the point where the Chinese co-opt our relationship with Korea and Japan. Ultimately America ends up an outsider to a major economic partnership in Northeast Asia.

On the other hand, the U.S. could recognize the unique capability in handling the North Koreans the Chinese possess and focuses its foreign policy to support such action. New dialogue with China is opened up paving the way for new, highly productive economic relationships in the future. As North Korea implodes, the Chinese act directly supported by the U.S., South Korea, and Japan. Reunification takes place over a reasonable time period that allows rehabilitation of the North Korean population and prepares them for life in an open society. South Korea, the U.S. and Japan all burden share appropriately, with experience becoming a vehicle that forges strong bonds among all players. This foundation is what the new Northeast Asian economic engine will be built upon, clearly forming the basis for new, closer and stronger security relationships that further stabilize the region. The result is peaceful reunification of Korea with minimal friction and cost, and the creation of an economic relationship that could potentially dwarf any the U.S. is now party to. The key point for policy makers to grasp is that China is the key player in any future Northeast Asian scenario, particularly in the future of the Korean Peninsula. Throughout history this has been true, and it is just as true today. Future U.S. policy should reflect this realization and move deliberately toward a close future relationship with China, using stabilization of the Korean situation as the specific point of departure.

## CONCLUSION

*"When a bird gets too big...it breaks its cage..."*[59]
*-Ancient Chinese aphorism*

This paper has attempted to logically develop a plausible alternative to common scenarios for reunification of the Korean Peninsula. While popular scenarios take for granted the primary role of the Korean people in the future of the peninsula following the demise of the present North Korean regime, this alternative scenario shows China to be the primary actor in the future of Korea. This scenario has been shown to have multiple historical precedents over several centuries. Additionally, China has repetitively demonstrated that Korea has always been critical to Chinese national interests and has not hesitated to act to protect those interests against multiple threats, to include from the U.S. and her allies. With this historical record of action in mind, present-day enhanced Chinese military and economic capabilities make the probability of deliberate Chinese action in a future crisis in Korea quite high. The Chinese are uniquely postured to protect their interests on the Korean peninsula, while maintaining peace and enhancing their prestige in the region and the world. An important aspect for the U.S. to consider is the possible co-opting of Japanese and South Korean alignment in the region as China emerges as the stabilizing power in the region. China was a world power for thousands of years. Its relegation to Third World status is a relatively new event and one the Chinese are diligently focused upon overcoming. The U.S. can be a part of this process, or it can be one of the obstacles the Chinese overcome on their way to attaining their goal. By being a part of this process America stands to gain much in the 21st

century economically as it taps into potentially the largest market on the globe, and from a security standpoint as it converts a potential near-peer rival into a potential near-peer ally. This will not be an easy task for the U.S. It will require a greater understanding of Asia than we have ever been required to show. America will need to redefine issues like human rights and democracy in Asian terms and appreciate the credibility (or lack thereof) our own history gives us amongst Asians. The speed with which the future is overtaking us requires that these decisions be made very soon. Assuming the plausibility of this scenario, the consideration of future regional policy approaches by the ROK and U.S. governments opens a vast new foreign policy area that, while transcending the scope of this limited study, warrants further research and development.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Banning Garret and Bonnie Glaser, "Looking Across the Yalu-Chinese Assessments of North Korea," *Asian Survey* Vol. XXXV, No. 6 (June 1996) : 529.

[2] Tae Hwan Kwak, "US-Military-Security Policy toward the Korean Peninsula in the 1990s," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. VII, No.2 (Winter 1995) : 238-239, 261-262. See also Tae Hwan Kwak, "Korea-US Security Relations in the 1990s-A Creative Adjustment," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. I, No. 2 (Winter 1989) : 143-66 and Tae Hwan Kwak, "ROK National Security in the 1990s," *Korean Journal of International Studies* Vol. XIX, No. 3 (1988) : 389-414.

[3]David S. Maxwell, "Catastrophic Collapse of North Korea: Implications for the United States Military." ( Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), 6-10. See also Young Jeh Kim, *Toward a Unified Korea: History and Alternatives,* Korean Unification Studies Series 2 (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, 1987), 123-188.

[4]Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition & Transformation-A History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1988)

[5] Ibid., 47-55.

[6] Ibid., 36.

[7] Ibid., 90-91.

[8] Ibid., 94.

[9] Ibid., 126.

[10] Ibid., 176-179.

[11] Ibid., 179, 182. Russian diplomatic pressure, in concert with France and Germany, eventually forced the Japanese to cancel this lease in 1895.

[12] Ibid., 172.

[13] Ibid., 176.

[14] Ibid., 193.

[15] Ibid., 200-219.

[16] Ibid., 261-325. See also Andrea Matles Savada, ed. *North Korea: A Country Study*, Area Handbook Series, Department of the Army Pamphlet 550-81, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1993), 28-32.

[17] Ibid., 329.

[18] Ibid., 330. See also Joseph Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, (New York: Times Books, 1982), 18-24.

[19] Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War,* 24-41.

[20] Yao Xu, *From Yalu River to Panmunjom*, (Beijing: People's Press, 1985), 17-18.

[21] Jian Chen, "China and the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (Summer 1995) : 314-335. See also Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *The China Quarterly* 121 (March 1990) : 94-115.

[22] Michael M. Sheng, "Beijing's Decision to Enter the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs* XIX, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 294-313.

[23] Chen, "China and the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 317, 323. See also Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly* , 99-100, 106. See also Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War,* (New York: MacMillan, 1960) This work is the first to analyze events with a view toward China's security concerns.

[24] Sheng, "Beijing's Decision to Enter the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 298. See also Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly* , 100-101.

[25] Ibid., 297, 30, 310. See also Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly* , 101.

[26] Ibid., 296-297. See also Chen, "China and the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 321-323.

[27] Ibid., 298. See also Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly* , 94-99.

[28] Mao was convinced the selected PLA units (initially renamed Northeastern Frontier Army, subsequently renamed the Chinese People's Volunteers) could defeat the U.S. in the field from sheer weight of numbers, and more recent experience. He believed only a military defeat in the field would bring the U.S. to the negotiating table under conditions favorable to China and the North Korea. See Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly,* 104-108. See also Sheng, "Beijing's Decision to Enter the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 307-313.

[29] Sheng, "Beijing's Decision to Enter the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 311.

[30] Yufan and Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *China Quarterly* , 111.

[31] Ibid., 98-99. See also Sheng, "Beijing's Decision to Enter the Korean War," *Korea and World Affairs,* 298.

[32] Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, 4.

[33] Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, "The Coming Conflict with America," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 76, No.2, (March/April 1997) : 19.

[34] Kwan Yoon Young. "The South Korean-Japan Relationship in Transition: Focusing on Japan's Domestic Reform and Post-Cold War Strategy." *Korea And World Affairs* Vol XIX, No. 4, (Winter 1995) : 603-610. For alternative discussion see Edward J. Lincoln, *Japan's New Global Role.* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1993) : 254-266.

[35] Kongdan Oh. *North Korea in the 1990s: Implications for the Future of the U.S.-South Korea Security Alliance* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation N-3480-A, 1992): 6.

[36] Lincoln, *Japan's New Global Role*, 254-266.

[37] The information here is voluminous. For recent discussion on the future of the U.S. economy see Diane B. Kunz, "The Fall of the Dollar Order." *Foreign Affairs* 74, No. 4 (July/August 1995) : 22-27 and W.L. Givens, "Economic Cocaine." *Foreign Affairs* 74, No. 4 (July/August 1995) : 17-21.

[38] Farrukh Iqbal, "Financing Korean Development." *Korea: The Year 2000*, eds. Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers (Lanham, MD: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1987) : 147-156. Dwight H.Perkins. "Korea's Economy in the Year 2000." *Korea: The Year 2000*, eds. Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers (Lanham, MD: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1987) :157-174. Park Eul-Young. "Foreign Direct Investment in Korea." *Korea: The Year 2000*, eds. Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers (Lanham, MD: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1987) : 207-224. David T. Goldman. "The Impact of Scientific and Technological Developments on the Korean Economy to the Year 2000 and the Prospects for Korean-US Technology Transfer." *Korea: The Year 2000*, eds. Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers (Lanham, MD: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1987) : 225-240. Kang Soo-Jang. Scientific Research and Technological Development in Korea." *Korea: The Year 2000*, eds. Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers (Lanham, MD: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1987) : 241-256.

[39] Nicholas Eberstadt, "Assessing "National Strategy" in North and South Korea," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Summer 1996) : 72-73.

[40] The point here is that restraint in the face of terrorist or military provocation has become part of the South Korean foreign policy toward Pyongyang. It is remarkable when compared to the reactions by the United States to far less provocation (e.g. recent actions against Iraq, Libya, the Mayaguez Incident etc.)

[41] Nicholas Eberstadt, "China's Trade with the DPRK, 1990-1994: Pyongyang's Thrifty New Patron," *Korea and World Affairs,* Vol. XIX, No. 4 (Winter 1995) : 665-685. See also Young-Ho Park, "Political Change in North Korea: Is There Any Possibility for System Transformation?" *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. VII, No.2 (Winter, 1995) : 224-228.

[42]Byung Joon Ahn. "The Man Who Would Be Kim." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 73, No. 6 (November/December 1994) : 103. See also Choong Nam Kim. "The Uncertain Future of North Korea: Soft Landing or Crash Landing?" *Korea and World Affairs* Vol. XX, No. 4 (Winter 1996) : 623-636. Steven Butler and Brian Palmer, "A Defector of the Highest Order," *U.S. News & World Report*, February 24, 1997, 43.

[43] Defense Intelligence Agency. *North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength* (Washington D.C.: 1991) : 21, 62.

[44] Defense Intelligence Agency. *North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength (Update 1995)* (Washington D.C.: 1996) : 22.

[45] James Bayer and Robert E. Bedeski, "North Korea's Nuclear Option: Observations and Reflections on the Recent NPT Crisis," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. V, No. 2 (Winter 1993) : 99-118. The discovery and revelation of the suspected reprocessing of nuclear waste into weapons grade plutonium by North Korea initiated heavy pressure on North Koreans to submit to IAEA inspectors under the conditions of the NPT to which they were signatories. The North Korean repudiation of the treaty in the face of increasing international pressure and accusations caused the United States to initiate direct negotiations. During these subsequent negotiations the North Koreans successfully bartered for the building of two light water reactors in return for site inspection conditions they had already agreed to under the NPT. To date the conditions have not been met by North Korea. What the issue demonstrates is the North Korean intent to barter with their nuclear capability to coerce needed economic concessions designed to keep the present regime viable.

[46] Young Namkoong, "An Analysis of North Korea's Policy to Attract Foreign Capital," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (Fall 1995) : 459-481. See also C.S. Eliot Kang, "Korean Unification: A Pandora's Box of Northeast Asia?" *Asian Perspective* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1996) : 12-14.

[47] Real economic reform would involve a marked departure or reversal of the Korean Workers Party *Juche* ideology founded by Kim Il Sung which has been the foundation of North Korea's isolationist philosophy for decades. The 43-year ideological indoctrination and isolation of the North Korean population has left the present regime with few options, if any, for reform. Implementing effective economic reforms would expose the generations of North Koreans to outside news and information. In view of the hardships imposed upon the North Korean people by the Kim dynasty, this exposure could conceivably reveal the bankruptcy of the *Juche* ideology and result in a violent backlash by the populace against the party. It is feared that these internal upheavals within North Korea could create such unstable conditions that a military attack by missile, possibly nuclear, and/or armed forces would be precipitated in a last ditch attempt by the regime retain power. See Park, "Political Change in North Korea: Is There Any Possibility for System Transformation?" *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 234-235.

[48] Maxwell, "Catastrophic Collapse of North Korea: Implications for the United States Military," 8-10.

[49] Nicholas Eberstadt, "Hastening Korean Unification," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 76, No. 2 (March/April 1997) : 77

[50] Garret and Glaser, "Looking Across the Yalu-Chinese Assessments of North Korea," *Asian Survey*, 545.

[51] Paul H. Kreisberg, "Threat Environment for a United Korea:2010," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Summer 1996) : 83.

[52] Ibid., 81-85.

[53] Ibid., 98, 104-105.

[54] Garret and Glaser, "Looking Across the Yalu-Chinese Assessments of North Korea," *Asian Survey*, 525-541.

[55] Dong Bok Lee, "Remembering and Forgetting: The Political Culture of Memory in Divided Korea." Korea and World Affairs, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (Fall 1995) : 439.

[56] Kreisberg, "Threat Environment for a United Korea:2010," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis,* 87, 92-94. See also Robert S. Ross, "Beijing as a Conservative Power," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 76, No. 2 (March/April 1997) : 33-44 and Michael Mazarr, "The Problem of a Rising Power: Sino-American Relations in the 21st Century," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol.VII, No. 2 (Winter 1995) : 7-39.

[57]Ibid., 93

[58]Dominic Ziegler, "China Survey," *The Economist* (8 March, 1997) : 10

[59] Fox Butterfield. *China: Alive in the Bitter Sea* (New York: Times Books, 1992) : 480.

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